



An Comunn Gàidhealach

ORGANISERS OF THE ROYAL NATIONAL MOD

13 July 2017

BBC Performance Consultation
Ofcom
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London
SE1 9HA

Dear Sir/Madam,

BBC ALBA

I am writing on behalf of An Comunn Gàidhealach formed 125 years ago with the specific aims of maintaining and developing the Scottish Gaelic language and culture. After many years of sustained effort on the part of individuals, organisations and successive governments, with cross-party political support, there are now strong indications that the rate of language decline has been arrested, and the number of learners and users of Gaelic in Scotland is on the increase, particularly amongst the younger generation

An Comunn Gàidhealach is aware, that the UK is a signatory party to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Scottish Gaelic is, therefore, officially recognised under international law as a minority language deserving of state protection. Under Article 11 of the Charter, to the extent that radio or television carries out a public service mission there is an obligation on the provider to encourage/facilitate the broadcasting of television programmes in the regional/minority language **on a regular basis**. This regular basis emphasises the requirement for new origination on radio and television, in the Gaelic language. Furthermore, under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act, the preamble states that the purpose of the Act is to make Gaelic an **official language of Scotland 'commanding equal respect to the English language'**. This strengthens our belief that the Gaelic community should have parity of esteem, and provision, in all public service broadcasting.

The OFCOM consultation document **"Holding the BBC to account for the delivery of its mission and public purposes"** gives welcome attention to Equality Impact Assessment and the BBC's responsibility to serve all audiences. An Comunn Gàidhealach has considered the list of diversity groups detailed in the consultation document with interest and it is our view that as an ethnic minority group (8.7.5) the Gaelic community is also represented in every other diversity group identified. Consequently, we very much welcome OFCOM's intention that *"the licencing approach as detailed in the consultation document would have a positive impact on the ... diversity groups"* identified. An Comunn Gàidhealach believes that the most positive impact on the broadcasting provision for Scottish Gaelic users will be a **substantial increase** in original programme production. We believe that such an enhancement of both Radio nan Gàidheal and BBC Alba output would better match the **"regular basis"** facilitation stipulation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages referred to above,

An Comunn Gàidhealach takes the view that with 1.1% of the Scottish population using Gaelic (2011 Census) the total Scottish Budget spend of only 0.7% on Gaelic (all provision including BBC Alba) by 2015 was hardly equitable. Gaelic users pay taxes like everyone else and An Comunn Gàidhealach believes they are entitled to equal and fair treatment.

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An Comunn Gàidhealach welcomes the cross-party support which the Gaelic language enjoys at both Holyrood and Westminster and it is also greatly encouraged by the Census evidence of growth in Gaelic speaker numbers in the under 20 age group. This confirms the success of Gaelic Medium Education and we are aware of growing demand for this provision across Scotland. Bòrd na Gàidhlig's 2013-14 Report showed that the number of children being educated in GME at secondary schools rose by 7% and 6.1% at primary school level. In Glasgow, demand has been so high for the one Gaelic school that a second school has been opened. A new school was also recently opened in Lochaber, and a new school is currently under construction in Portree, Skye.

Given the importance of radio and television in education delivery, and the fact that we require to build a Gaelic Broadcasting service to meet the needs of a growing audience, we believe the case for more resources to be immediately applied to Gaelic broadcasting to be compelling.

It is important to note that BBC Alba has consistently attracted audiences substantially greater than the official Gaelic speaker population totals, and An Comunn Gàidhealach believes this to be evidence of programme quality, growing awareness of the language, and interest in its acquisition.

An Comunn Gàidhealach believes that BBC Alba and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal continue to sustain audience appreciation and that both services deserve recognition and increased resources,

We ask for your consideration of the following:

- An increase in first run origination output on BBC ALBA to reduce reliance on repeats (increased from less than 2 hours a day of new programmes to a minimum of 3 hours a day).
- A quota for first run originations on BBC Alba in a similar manner to that which is being proposed for other BBC Channels. The minimum quota to deliver the afore-mentioned increase in first run origination.
- We seek extended services to a range of audiences covering sport, music, arts and community interest programmes and news coverage over weekend periods. This will educate; inform and entertain the BBC Alba Audience.

An Comunn Gàidhealach appreciates the opportunity to respond to this consultation

Yours sincerely,

Allan Campbell,
President,
An Comunn Gàidhealach.

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